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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6957
INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 9179
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JUL LIMA 5248
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 0455
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5850
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UNCLAS BOGOTA 005035

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SUBJECT: FARC SEEKS ICRC HELP TO RETURN MURDERED HOSTAGES'
REMAINS

REF: BOGOTA 4741 AND PREVIOUS

FARC Requests ICRC "Good Offices"

¶1. On July 9, the FARC posted an open letter on its web portal Annacol from Secretariat member Raul Reyes requesting the "good offices" of international intermediaries -- mainly the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) -- to facilitate handover of the remains of 11 Valle assemblymen murdered while in FARC custody June 18 (reftel). The FARC attributed the deaths to a crossfire during an attack by an unidentified military group. Reyes blamed delays in delivering the remains to the presence of "official and parastatal" troops near where the hostages were held. In a rare hint of FARC contrition, the group admitted it had "failed in its mission to protect the prisoners."

ICRC Awaits Clarification

¶2. The Red Cross publicly confirmed it had received both the FARC request and GOC authorization to proceed, but no time or place for handover had been confirmed. The ICRC announced it was ready to undertake the effort, contingent on GOC and FARC guarantees of security. The FARC has not specified other terms for the handover, possibly including a demilitarized zone. The GOC has consistently ruled out creation of such a zone, a perennial FARC demand. ICRC Colombia Director Barbara Hintermann told us a "confidential dialogue is crucial for the continuation of the negotiation" to recover the remains.

GOC Cautious; Colombians March

¶3. The GOC supports the ICRC in its humanitarian mission but remains skeptical of FARC intentions. Interior and Justice Minister Carlos Holguin said, "The Government gives full backing to the Red Cross. We are ready for it to proceed. Hopefully the Red Cross will know soon to what area the communique refers." The murdered hostages' families urged contacts to begin in order to bring closure to their ordeals. On July 5, millions across Colombia responded to the murders with a series of protest marches and other displays of solidarity against FARC murders and kidnapping, demanding the release of all hostages.

